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Between Celtic, Italic and Etruscan worlds. Re-thinking Boundaries and Models of Interaction across the Alps

In Italian Archaeology, especially for the Iron Age period, traditional approaches have been based for more than 150 years on material studies as primary means to identify the ancient peoples mentioned in Greek and Roman written sources. Thus, the different archaeological cultures have been often perceived as close and immutable entities, defined by geographical and cultural sharp-edge boundaries, and presumed specific languages, productions, and rituals.

Not surprisingly, several ‘buffer’ zones, always problematic, elusive and indistinct, had to be assumed all around the margins of the given ethnic core areas, whatsoever labelled, for example in north-west Italy, as ‘celtic’, ‘ligurian’, or ‘etruscan’. However, in the last few years, new discoveries and reviews of ancient data from several sites, as well as theoretical advances, are providing evidence to undermine such an oversimplified, rigid and ‘culture-history’ biased framework.

The present paper thus focuses on the complex cultural and trading network of northwest Italy, exploring the nuanced relations between the Golasecca culture, its neighbouring regions (Southern Piedmont, Liguria, southern Switzerland), and the so-called ‘etruscan’ population of the Emilian Po valley.

We shall propose a critical review of the traditional markers of cultural identity, mobility, and interaction, questioning the role and the very concept of cultural margins. Thanks to a comparative and critical analysis of settlement patterns, productive modes, and funerary landscapes, we finally reconsider the traditional ethnic narratives, looking for alternative theoretical models and new understanding of the role of ‘indigenous’ Iron Age communities of northwest Italy within the broader picture of the Mediterranean-Central Europe relations.

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Hidden border zones – Sicily as an area of cultural contact in the archaic period

In many prehistoric and historical periods, Sicily forms an important hub in the Western Mediterranean. This holds true also for the archaic period, when Greek settlers got in touch with indigenous groups and with the Phoenicians in the west of the island. For a long time, archaeologists considered this process as a “one-way street” (i.e. as colonisation), while recent research increasingly proves the complexity of the historical processes from the 8th to the 5th centuries B.C. in Sicily. In the lecture, the relationships between Greeks and indigenous peoples will be analysed, basing mainly on the material culture with a focus on metal objects.